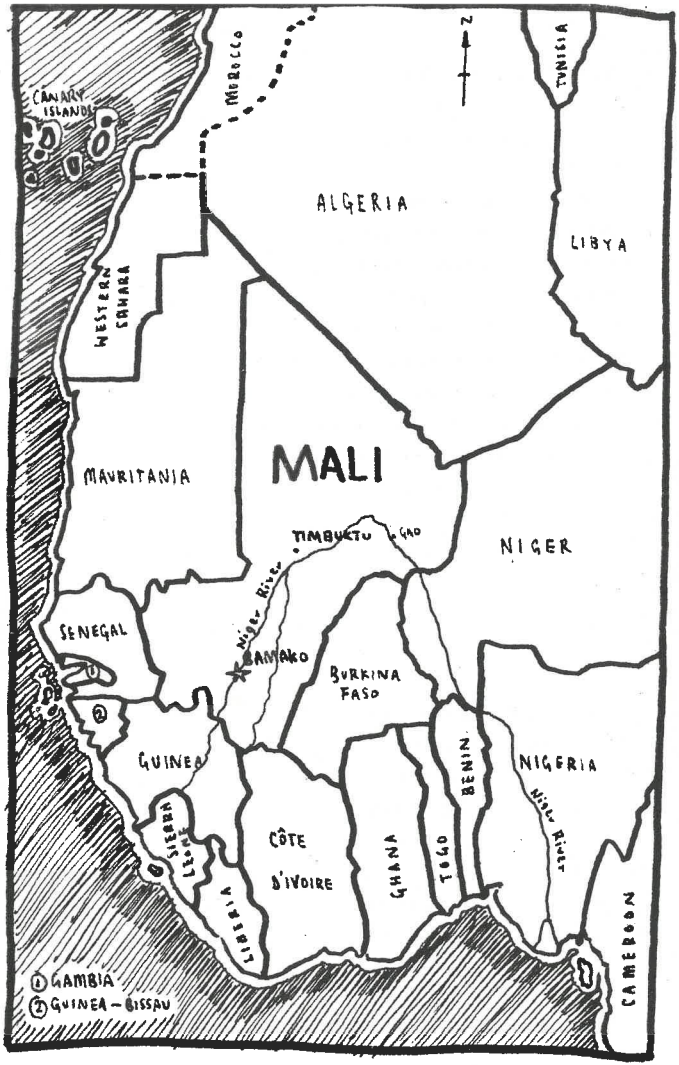
I'm amazed all over again at how you can travel for tens of thousands of kilometres, leap-frogging from city to city and never once leave the rarefied atmosphere of the energy-rich. From pastel capsules into cavernous, coded, conditioned airport terminals where the most popular products of the world's most ubiquitous corporations are available to purchase under the world's most familiar brands. The journeys between these transit malls are passed with the latest offerings from Hollywood's wealthiest corporations, and in reaching the next stop - this one exotically named 'Bangkok' - I must have arrived at what must be one of the centres of this globalised world.

Great vaulted ceilings of steel and glass and concrete swallow the milling clusters of disgorged passengers. Corridors stretch away for kilometres in every direction; it's almost 11 at night and still planes are spewing out their human cargo. Travellers seem to be grouped by culture, with lone hybrids like me orbiting the edges as they drift gently down the travelators, past illuminated billboards. I pass through a flood of East Asian tour groups, their guides frantically waving coloured silk flags as their patrons, coded by matching coloured stickers, scramble and reach for small children transfixed by the bright lights.

The travelator carries me past a grove of concrete palm trees, plastic fronds silently gathering dust and unexpected cobwebs three storeys up. Hidden speakers play a 'Caribbean'-flecked synth-muzak version of *Yesterday* before moving onto a track which seems to be the same five notes looped over and over. I've been in transit now for twelve hours. I've eaten four meals, swallowed three 'light-snacks',


CANARY ISLANDS
MOROCCO
N
TUNISIA
ALGERIA
LIBYA
WESTERN SAHARA
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SENEGAL
Niger River
BAMAKO
BURKINA FASO
GUINEA
SIERRA LEONE
LIBERIA
CÔTE D'IVOIRE
GHANA
TOGO
BENIN
NIGERIA
Niger River
CAMEROON
① GAMBIA
② GUINEA-BISSAU

watched two feature films, and glided past perhaps sixty billboards plastered with the ecstatically demure bedroom faces of fragrances, all without one molecule of fresh air touching my skin.

Indulgences here come in glass boxes: there are glass boxes for smokers, aquariums where those inclined can sit in rows or cluster conversationally around steel benches blowing fumes; there are glass boxes for sitting in rows to check your email; glass boxes where people stand in rows waiting to change their currency. All the while, cleaners in blue suits and surgical masks disappear around corners or dash from hidden doorway to narrow corridor, always just out of sight as they push yellow buckets and clutch their pans of swept and collected dust.

And while the global language of hyper-efficiency and shiny floors ricochets people around the planet, heaven help you should try to reach somewhere the falls just outside this club of connections, the largest shopping mall in the solar system.

I'd walked into the travel agent a few weeks before, and asked for prices for a return ticket to Mali.

"Okay," said the agent, "won't be moment." The faces of Masai tribesmen and indigenous Latin Americans smiled down on me from the wall of glossy brochures. In the background, computers hummed as the row of agents rhythmically tapped away at the keyboards. The agent surfaced.

"Alright, Mali. It'll be $1100 return, plus taxes of about $420," she said.

"That's good. Cheaper than I expected," I said, preparing to leave. "You'd be able to make all the necessary arrangements for visas wouldn't you?

"Sure," she said. Then paused. Tapped away for a moment. "You did say 'Mali', didn't you?"

"Yes."

"And which 'Mali' would that be? Male in the Maldives? Or Mali in …"

"West Africa."

"Ah." She returned to the screen for a moment. Frowned.

"Maybe you'd better show me on the map." An hour and a half later, she had something: five flights, bouncing across the surface of the earth before finally resting in Bamako.

We pass over Africa above the clouds. There's a hum of conversation from passengers returning home or visiting family. It's serene up here in the midday glare after the packed night flight from Bangkok.

Dipping beneath the thick, white blanket of cloud, we find the grey-brown plains and peaks of Ethiopia replaced by dark, green valleys of jungle. There are triangles cut from the edges of hillsides revealing the orange mud of the earth, littered with fallen trunks like matchsticks. We come in low, over orange roads through the forest, expanses of rivers flowing into estuaries.

"This place is water," says the Kenyan woman beside me. Buildings appear, gathered in clearings, their rooves ochre with rust and ringed by groves of tall palm trees. Thick jungle and a strip of tarmac amid rusting rooves and concrete guard posts. The plane pauses for a moment, a

soldier in khaki watches from the shade of a palm, scratching his head. Abidjan is a stop, one of two on an allegedly direct flight to Dakar, and as we pull away, up again, past a hangar for the UN, I see the city peel away, an ocean of flat tin rooves mounted on single-storey, grey concrete buildings. Church steeples seem to be the highest structures and suddenly the jungle, the city, Côte d'Ivoire ends in a length of orange sand meeting the ocean.

If Côte d'Ivoire was water, Mali is parched. Squat buildings are splayed in clearings in the woodland. Trees sprinkle the landscape looking thin and fragile against the ground. I step outside for the first time in almost forty hours. The sun cuts my skin, my eyes smart in the sudden sharpness of the air, the smell of smoke, jet-fuel.

This is Bamako: tarmac, and I'm walking towards the terminal, passed green-clad jackbooted troops and into the thickness of anywhere indoors in a place like this. A man from the Malian peasant organisation Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes du Mali (CNOP) meets me. He grabs my hand, smiles.

Visas are checked, my passport stamped, luggage collected and we're walking across an empty carpark, littered with upturned teapots and lizards scattering for cover. We're in a taxi that feels like it has oval shaped wheels. We're on the highway, four empty lanes with the kerbs carefully painted in black and white stripes, lined by the billboards of South African and Australian mining companies and global telecommunications corporations. Beyond the edges of the shimmering, black bitumen, orange dust stretches away, we pass entire families stacked onto bicycles, pulling trailers

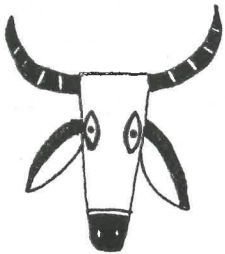
piled high with straw. On the plains beyond stretches an ocean of blue and black plastic bags caught on the stubble of grass and tough shrubs like a shimmering polyethylene bruise. A Kenyan woman tells me later how plastic bags have been introduced as a prelude to industrialisation, pushing the once common reusable, biodegradable fabric bags almost out of existence. The plastic bag is globalisation's flag.

We pass through an sweeping mud arch painted with the three crocodiles of Bamako's coat of arms and suddenly the expanses of dust and plastic bags peter out and the highway becomes enclosed with low concrete buildings, rows of huts and shelters, pump-handle petrol stations, the hot sky, all tinted the same dry orange of the earth. Red dust, terracotta pots, women stepping into the road with rainbow plastic bowls on their heads and everything smelling of smoke.

Exhausted, we drive through the night. I wake with every bump to a dark, changing landscape. We pass through villages, shadows in the lights of the van, wood is stacked along the road with the black shapes of sleeping mud huts beyond. We stop at one checkpoint, then another, then another, each time the driver disappearing for a time to speak to someone. Outside we can see rows of trucks awaiting authorisation, families encircling campfires as they wait out the night. Every checkpoint in the dark, its ring of campfires and waiting people, its boom-gates and donkey carts are part of a new language, taking me away from familiar syllables.

BASIC BAMBARA

HELLO	INITCHE
GOOD MORNING	ANISOGOMA
GOOD AFTERNOON	ANITILE
GOOD EVENING	ANIWULA
GOOD NIGHT	ANISU
MY NAME IS...	N'TOGO
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?	E'TOGO
PLEASE	SABALI
THANKYOU	INITCHE
SORRY	HAKETO
YES	AWO
NO	AYI
BYE BYE	KA'AMBE



In the morning, I awake to the sound of goats' bells and children talking on the way to school. Lizards scatter as I push open the metal shutters of the window and outside, beyond a fence of bound brush, lies the dusty town of Sélingué.

I'm early for the World Forum on Food Sovereignty, named 'Nyéléni' after a legendary Malian woman farmer, a symbol of heroism deeply linked with food sovereignty. With a handful of other delegates I walk out to explore the forum site. The international peasants' network La Via Campesina, together with CNOP and other groups involved in the forum's development had decided to build an entire village to host the event. It lies on the outskirts of Sélingué town, the lone paved road to Bamako stretching past, buzzing with motor-scooters and donkey carts.

It's only two days before the forum is due to begin and the site is crowded with workers, some are digging trenches for plumbing, their picks and mattocks tethered with old inner-tubes to the backs of bicycles. Little dust devils whirl around the clusters of gleaming white mud huts, blinding in the morning sun and Lake Sélingué beyond. The site is almost treeless but for a few persistent stumps and a jacaranda. The hot winds pick up clouds of the fine pale dust, sprinkling it over the thatched rooves and faces of the workers. There are clusters of women, luminous in swathes of wax-printed cloth sweeping out the huts, others are nonchalantly painting designs in black and ochre on the walls, others are pouring concrete, and others sit chatting under the shade of newly thatched rooves.

Someone is painting "INFO" in big red letters on the side

of the newly whitewashed media centre, and the shuttered windows and doors are damp and sharp-smelling with varnish. There is a blur of people connecting up dusty computers, and among them is Paul Nicholson, from the Basque Farmers' Union and La Via Campesina.

Could you explain what 'food sovereignty' is?
Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to determine what they eat, who produces it, and how it's produced. And it is a very important right now, because we are losing that right. We don't know what we are eating. We don't know who produces our food and how it's produced. And that is a problem all over the world. Food is the major problem in the world: there are 856 million people who go hungry every day, and the tendency is to increase this number, not decrease it. Today, for the first time in history, it is also basically the rural people, peasants, who go hungry. Therefore, food sovereignty is the universal right of all peoples, of all citizens both in the North and in the South to determine what we eat.

So, what are the threats to food sovereignty?
Right now, the whole 'free trade' logic is destroying local economies and local capacity to produce food and to maintain a local culture. It is destroying local knowledge of the land and of the environmental and ecological sustainability of the land.

It is important then to defend the whole concept of local and regional economies. These free trade agreements - whether it's the WTO, bilateral agreements or regional agreements - their main objective is to break down local markets. In this context, their cultural impact is fundamental: free trade introduces a new model of production and a new model of consumption which is destroying the basic fabric of knowledge of sustainable land use.

In Mali we have two classic examples, the case of rice and the case of milk. Two basic, staple foods.

Mali is basically an agricultural country. Historically it is self-sufficient. Today they've had to open up the markets. The milk industry was privatised and subsequently there was a big drive for milk production. And when the milk industry was privatised, suddenly the import of European milk was far cheaper than milk production in Mali. Now, the Malian industry only buys milk from Europe. It's destroyed the whole fabric of milk production.

Rice is a staple food here. Mali is self-sufficient in food production, yet rice coming from Asia or from the United States has invaded the local market, making it impossible for local rice production [to compete].

These trade agreements basically support an

industrialised, multinational-driven form of agriculture. It destroys local food production, knowledge, culture and economies. That impact is equal in Europe and in Africa.

How does 'free trade' impact farmers in your community?

I come from the Basque community. We are small farmers. We are farmers who historically have had a very close relationship with our local markets. Now the importation of food is destroying our capacity to compete with globalised food. We still maintain our culture - there is not one McDonald's in the whole of the Basque country - but it is a huge fight to maintain relationships with consumers and a culture of food. Therefore, our fight is to maintain our own small food production and processing industries, tied to our local markets.

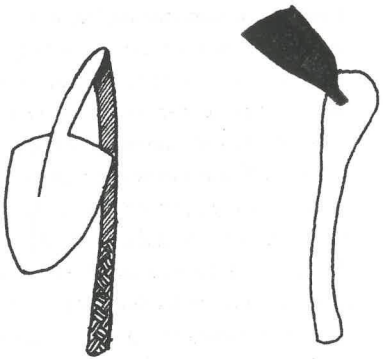
Why are you here in Mali? What's the importance of the World Forum for Food Sovereignty?

We are crazy, I think. But we are crazy in that we have a vision of the future. We have a vision that between all the peoples of the world we can work out a common vision, a common plan of action to put food sovereignty as the main negotiating value between countries. Our vision is that it needs to be constructed locally and concretely, as well as internationally. And here we are building our own site, with our own means: that is our future.

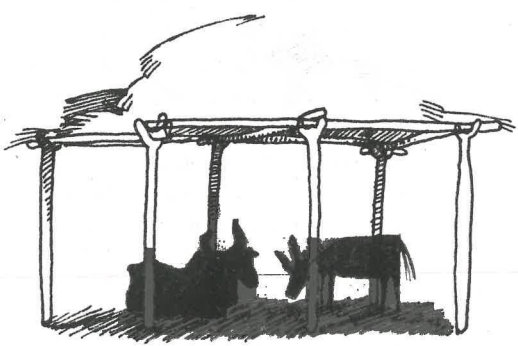
The forum is held here, hours from the capital of a country that's off that map for most of the North, because this is the reality of rural life for most of the world. As the sun slowly sinks, a shimmering disc suspended in the dusty sky, silhouetted fisherfolk punt their pirogues across Lake Sélingué, checking their nets. If you follow the road towards the lake, you'll come to rice paddies, banana groves and vegetable gardens, stretching away down the river valley. While irrigated by a hulking dam that contains the lake, the fields and paddies are gravity-fed, the levels constantly readjusted with mattocks and shovels to regulate the flow. The plots are leased by families, ploughed by oxen and cultivated by hand. Water is scooped onto rows of pumpkins, lemongrass, amaranth and onions from gourd bowls.

Beyond, you cross the river, a tributary of the Niger, to where pirogues are moored and the fisherfolk unload their catch. There's a village here of mud huts. No photos are permitted, the villagers have beliefs about the power of cameras and a fierce sense of privacy. After receiving permission to enter the village from the village elder - "the oldest man in the area," you are proudly told - you walk among the huts, thatched granaries raised on wooden legs, donkeys and cattle chewing contentedly in the shade of an open straw barn. The village mechanic stores fuel in glass liquor bottles resting on a wooden rack on the roadside.

Even back in Bamako, vacant lots, roadsides and the banks of the Niger and its tributaries are given over to food production, meticulous grids of vegetables and herbs. Like rural Sélingué, it's dominated by human scale technologies:



HAND TOOLS



hand tools, donkey carts, bicycles; the urban gardens are irrigated by water hoisted from wells. Mango trees grow along the streets and papayas flourish behind compound walls.

The forum site is intended to embody the emphasis on the local that permeates 'food sovereignty'. Over the three months it's taken to build, it has been constructed entirely by hand using local materials and local, traditional methods. The straw, the bricks, the bamboo are all from Sélingué. When the food is prepared in the following days, it is prepared exclusively from locally grown produce (GMO-free, we are enthusiastically reminded), by a local women's cooperative. The meat is slaughtered daily on a bed of leaves only a few metres from where we eat. No companies are contracted in the construction or running of the site; rather, local people are employed. "As we build this place, we also build the future," announces one of the coordinators later. And like the site, food sovereignty is a movement under construction.

By the first official day of activities, the forum has already begun to lose some of the roughness that betrayed the enormity of its ambition. With electricity, the 'cleanest water in Africa' and 500 people comfortably ensconced on mattresses in mud huts, some of the wonder of what we are experiencing softens.

In the days leading up to the forum, one of the coordinators discussed some of the challenges they were facing and encouraged participants to face it with a smile, much understanding and the knowledge that we are part of

MAAFÉ

This dish was a staple, particularly out in Sélingué where it was served two or three times a day, always with rice, millet or couscous. It could be served with meat (beef, goat or donkey) or just as a sauce with rice — "riz arachide".

peanut oil
1 tablespoon ginger, minced
4 tomatoes, diced
2 tablespoons tomato paste
salt
1/2 teaspoon sweet paprika
3 white or yellow onions, diced
3-4 cloves garlic, minced
1 cup peanut paste
2-3 cups water
pepper
beef, chicken, goat, fish, kangaroo or equivalent

1. Heat oil in a large pot and sauté onions until translucent
2. Add garlic and ginger and sauté a further 2 minutes
3. Add meat (or equivalent vegetables) and sauté until lightly browned
4. Add tomato paste and stir in for a minute.
5. Stir in tomatoes and reduce heat
6. Add peanut butter and water, stirring until paste is smooth and thick
7. Season with salt, pepper, paprika or chillis and simmer for 40 minutes
8. Check the taste again and serve with rice, millet or couscous

MAASA

These sweet millet fritters were served every morning, sprinkled with sugar, and accompanied by bread, mangoes and millet porridge. I'm still not completely sure of the quantities of (soy) milk and water, so experiment and add it to the mix gradually.

100mL milk
100mL water
2 cups millet flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
extra sugar, for sprinkling
2-3 tablespoons sugar
2-3 teaspoons of active dry yeast
2 cups brown rice flour
oil, for frying

1. Combine milk and water in a small pan and gently heat.
2. Pour the mixture into a bowl, stir in the sugar until it's dissolved
3. Add the yeast and let it stand in a warm place (on top of a warm oven or near the stove) until the yeast becomes frothy.
4. Sift millet flour, rice flour and baking powder together into a large bowl.
5. Stir in the yeast mixture — the mixture should be thick and moist like thick pancake batter, if not, more liquid will have to be warmed and added. Cover and leave to rise for 30-40 minutes.
6. Stir the mixture gently and briefly, it should be like thick pancake batter, but fluffy with the yeast.
7. In a large pan or wok, fry spoonfuls of the mixture in shallow hot oil for 5 minutes, turning frequently to prevent burning and to ensure they cook through. Drain cooked maasa on towels.
8. Serve warm, sprinkled with sugar — or jam's quite good too.

building a global movement. The mild discomfort we experience here is a daily reality for much of the world's population. As Fernando, a farmer from northern Spain remarked, gazing at the clusters of white huts, "A four star hotel would be completely inappropriate."

I ask Nnimmo Bassey, from Environmental Rights Action (Friends of the Earth Nigeria), about the significance of talking about food sovereignty in Africa,

I think having a world food sovereignty meeting in Africa is very significant because in today's world, when you talk about food, when you talk about hunger, the pictures that flash across people's television screens across the world is of people starving in Africa. In fact, governments and the national agencies that work on food issues would not readily give a thought to food sovereignty. All they talk about is food security. People don't want us to care about what we eat, they only want us to worry about having something on the table. This directly affects our dignity as human beings because you are forced to eat whatever you are given. You are not given the space to meet your own needs: to decide what you want to eat, to decide what you want to grow and to cultivate.

There are a whole lot of interlinked issues here and this conference on food sovereignty, I believe, will help to decouple a lot of these issues, so people

can see that Africans may be hungry, but not because there is no food. Rather because the food is not in the right place at the right time, and because of issues like a lack of rural infrastructure, because of denied access to credit and because of twisted policies that want people to follow a failed pattern. For example, rather than pursuing organic agriculture, rather than using principles developed over centuries, our farmers are being encouraged to use genetically engineered seed, to rely on artificial fertilisers and to follow the failed patterns of the 'green revolution'.

This food sovereignty conference will mean a rethink on the part of government and policy makers, as well as reaffirming the dignity in farming and depending on one's knowledge and skills on the part of our farmers and people.

It's interesting that the conference is in Mali, in particular. Tell me why Mali's significant.

It's very important that we're here in Mali, because Mali is emblematic of the continent of Africa. It is a place of rich diversity, it's a huge landmass and it's a place that had one of the earliest universities in the world, the university of Timbuktu. Many centuries ago that was already established here. Mali has been a prominent trade centre over the centuries, with great names in history like Sundiata, like

Kankan Musa who used to take gold from here to Asia, especially to the Arabian Peninsula. Mali is a country where you have a rich agricultural heritage, and although a vast part of the country is covered by the Sahara desert, the people are still able to meet their food needs. It shows a spirit of resilience and what Africa can achieve. It is a land of potentials, and of course, a land of very beautiful music and people.

Nnimmo's allusions to the politics of hunger, food aid and dignity were emphasised repeatedly over the coming days. At the core of the critiques of the current paradigm of food aid was that it is not intended to support or strengthen local economies. While there may be a shortage of food in one area, I was repeatedly told, more often than not an adjacent region has a surplus. However, aid programs don't account for this, rather they continue to import food from Europe or the United States which may be genetically-modified or even just culturally inappropriate.

When programs have quotas that they must meet, as apparently the World Food Program has, then communities continue to be deluged by food regardless of whether they need it or not. As a woman from Malawi told me, this is devastating for local markets. In a year when a community has more than enough food, aid programs continue to deliver, resulting in the local markets becoming flooded with food. As a consequence, there is little demand for local farmers' produce and subsequently, it becomes unviable for farmers to plant crops for the following year, initiating -

cycle of import dependence that shatters local markets. Suddenly, aid begins to look chillingly like agricultural 'dumping' (the process by which Europe and the US exports subsidised food at artificially low prices to undermine and infiltrate local markets). The alternative offered was simple: aid programs should instead offer money to areas experiencing a food shortage, allowing them to purchase culturally appropriate food from adjacent regions, thus cultivating and sustaining resilient local economies.

An interesting dynamic of gazes emerges around the site. After the photographic feeding frenzy of the first days when everything is new and exotic fodder for delegates' cameras - from women carrying things on their heads to children walking to school - at mealtimes the fence that surrounds the site becomes a grandstand. Children from the town descend to watch, fascinated by the foreigners (cameras hanging from necks) staggering from patch of shade to patch of shade, poking at the strange grains on their plates.

The forum's days are full, beginning when the sun begins to warm the inside of the huts. There are queues of people lining up beside the taps outside, washing their faces and cleaning their teeth. After a breakfast of miller fritters, mangoes and goat stew, the day's activities begin. There are layers of complexity: regional discussions deal with logistics; sectorial discussions representing peasants and farmers, fisherfolk, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, workers, migrants, urban movements and consumers ensure each group's interests are represented; interest groups ensure that

the voices of women, youth and the environment are heard; and combined thematic working groups draw together the perspectives to discuss food sovereignty in the context of everything from trade policy to conflict and disaster to forced migration to the preservation of traditional knowledge. Despite their complexity, by the end of the first day these layers seem unexpectedly functional.

There's a lull in the heat of the afternoon and delegates drift from dusty shadow to dusty shadow, returning to their huts for sweaty siestas. By 4.00pm, the silence is broken again by conversation and the chants of different regions. The sudden chant of "Down! Down! WTO!" explodes from a regional meeting of East and Southeast Asians. Not to be outdone, the South Americans immediately throw themselves into long and elaborately choreographed war cries: "Alerta! Alerta! Alerta! Presente! Presente! America Latina! …" La Via Campesina's chant, "Globalise struggle!" "Globalise hope!" is called and answered, first in Spanish, then English, then French.

Latin America, Africa, South Asia and Southeast and East Asia are the regions best represented. There's a handful of Europeans and North Americans, more from Central Asia and the Middle East and as the only person from Oceania, I'm temporarily adopted by Southeast Asia.

Night is filled with music. There's a DJ in a neighbouring dustbowl, with an accumulated sound system yelling through distorting speakers as kids from the surrounding villages dance like Fred Astaire robots. There are drums being beaten in trenches dug for mud bricks, and here and there, transistor radios wheeze out Malian classics through the

kazoo of their tiny speakers. The circle of drums clears a space in the dust where young women from the village dance frenetically and always in perfect unison. A couple of Indian men try to join in, the older women from the town roar with laughter and gently, cheerily, usher them aside.

A Norwegian journalist tells me that the World Forum for Food Sovereignty has very consciously tried to build on the lessons of the World Social Forum, while establishing itself as a major movement in its own right. This is already evident in the careful selection of participants, ensuring the involvement of those whose daily lives are part of the struggle for food sovereignty. Farmers, peasants, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples and rural workers make up the overwhelming majority of delegates, with representatives from non-governmental organisations kept carefully minimal.

It takes me a little while to realise that food sovereignty is not just about food. Rather it acknowledges food as the common ground for all peoples and identifies it as a starting point and guiding theme for broader change. Food sovereignty suggests that it's impossible to explore how food is produced, traded and consumed without questioning the whole fabric of global economics and society, from resource-intensive industrial production of crops and livestock, to the emergence of dangerous technologies like GMOs and nanotechnology, to the paradigm of global trade peddled by institutions like the World Trade Organisation and manifested in Free Trade Agreements, to food aid as an extension of the North dumping on the South, to the

patenting of traditional knowledge, and through all these aspects, the increasing consolidation of corporate control of food production and trade.

And beneath all of this, I realise, food sovereignty is about connection to land and connection to place. Food sovereignty places those from food production traditions that have been maintained within the boundaries of specific environments over time at the centre of its discussions and action. By acknowledging the wisdom of those who have been feeding their communities for centuries, the peasants, indigenous peoples, fisherfolk and others, it recognises that those who still maintain living traditions of closeness to the earth are best placed to make decisions and advise on how land should be used and how food can continue to be cultivated, traded and consumed in their communities and beyond.

After five days, the dust settles and Nyéléni village is suddenly empty. It's handed over to Malian peasant organisations to continue to build social movements, and the delegates are packed onto buses back to Bamako, to skip across the oceans of the world back to their farms, their forests, their fincas faraway.

Declaration of Nyéléni, 27 February 2007
World Forum for Food Sovereignty, Sélingué, Mali

We, more than 500 representatives from more than 80 countries, of organisations of peasants and family farmers, artisanal fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, landless peoples, rural workers, migrants, pastoralists, forest communities, women, youth, consumers and environmental and urban movements have gathered together in the village of Nyéléni in Sélingué, Mali to strengthen a global movement for food sovereignty.

We are doing this, brick by brick as we live here in huts constructed by hand in the local tradition and eat food that is produced and prepared by the Sélingué community. We give our collective endeavour the name 'Nyéléni' as a tribute to and inspiration from a legendary Malian peasant woman who farmed and fed her peoples well.

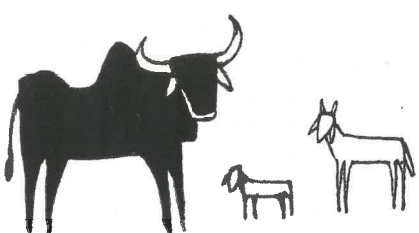
Most of us are food producers and are ready, able and willing to feed the world's peoples. Our heritage as food producers is critical to the future of humanity. This is especially so in the case of women and indigenous peoples who are historical creators of knowledge about food and agriculture. But this heritage and our capacities to produce healthy, good and abundant food are being threatened and undermined by neo-liberalism and

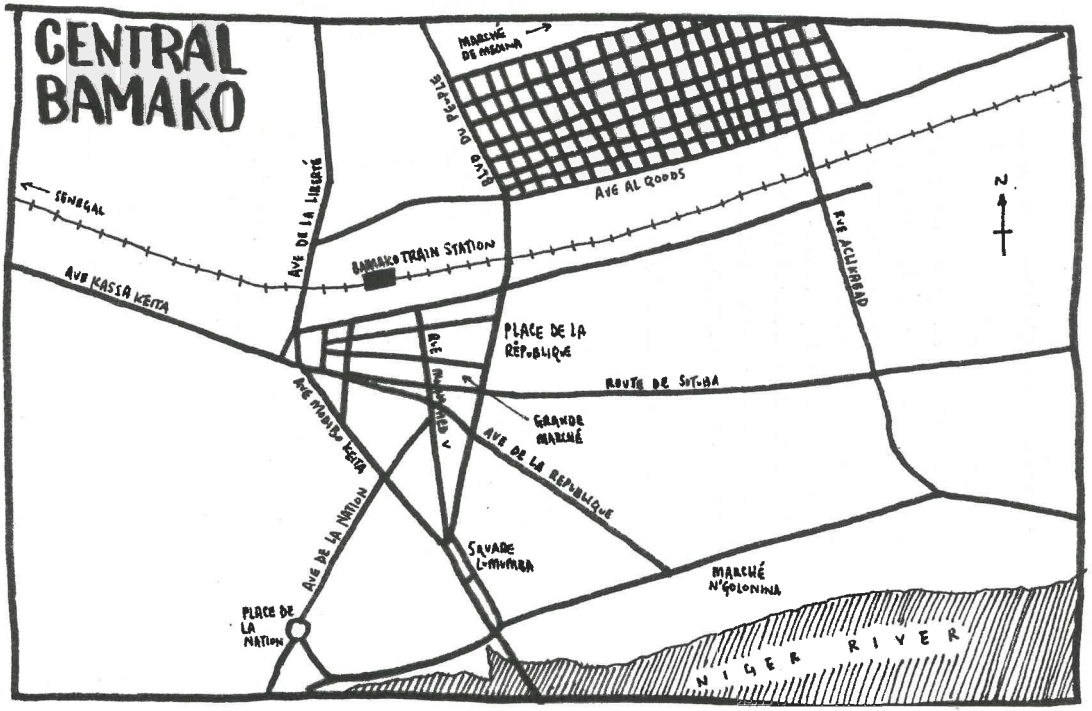
healthy, good and abundant food are being threatened and undermined by neo-liberalism and global capitalism. Food sovereignty gives us the hope and power to preserve, recover and build on our food producing knowledge and capacity.

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and offers directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers and users. Food sovereignty prioritises local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just incomes to all peoples as well as

the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social and economic classes and generations.

In Nyéléni, through numerous debates and interactions, we are deepening our collective understanding of food sovereignty and learning about the realities of the struggles of our respective movements to retain autonomy and regain our powers. We now understand better the tools we need to build our movement and advance our collective vision.

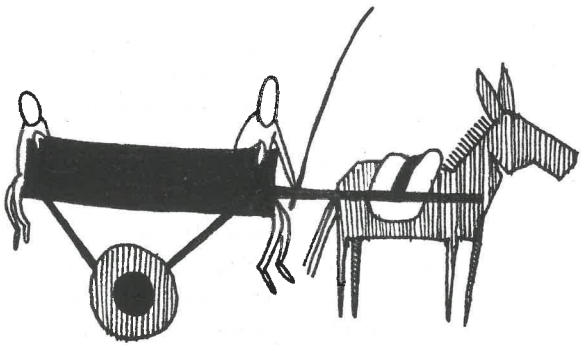



CENTRAL BAMAKO
MARCHÉ DE MEDINA
BLVD DU PEUPLE
AVE AL QODS
SENEGAL
AVE DE LA LIBERTÉ
BAMAKO TRAIN STATION
AVE KASSA KEITA
RUE ACLHRAD
N
PLACE DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE
RUE MAMADOU V
ROUTE DE SOTUBA
AVE MAMADOU KONATE
GRANDE MARCHÉ
AVE DE LA REPUBLIQUE
AVE DE LA NATION
SAVADE L'HUMURA
MARCHÉ N'GOLONINA
PLACE DE LA NATION
NIGER RIVER

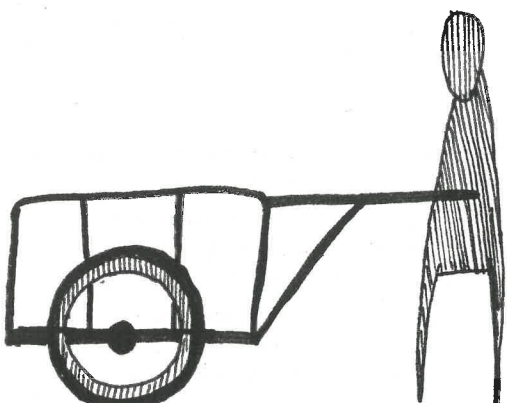
I set out to find the Grand Marché, Bamako's main market. It sprawls over numerous blocks and threatens to swamp the city's arterial roads. Very quickly I find myself entangled in the vermicelli of its corridors, dark alleyways spiralling apparently ever inwards until you're spat out somewhere in the sunlight again.

For a newcomer like me, it seems impossible not to get lost in the claustrophobic web of tunnels, alleyways and streets. Curiously however, there are no dead-ends. You always seem to be able to keep walking without ever having to double back. Even when you find yourself in a courtyard, surrounded by men vivisecting carcasses with axes on one side and bent forms incanting their afternoon prayers among tailors with hand powered sewing machines on the other, even then there's always one more doorway.

One more doorway and you're back again into streets of woven textiles, streets of wax prints, streets of steel bowls, of plastic bags emblazoned with the words 'NEW YORK' or 'LONDON', streets of sticker vendors, brightly coloured for decorating motor-scooters: Osama Bin Laden, clutching a machine gun and with assorted armaments zooming out from behind him sits next to others of Bob Marley, of Malian President Amadou Toumani Touré (affectionately known as ATT) and a slightly wonky pink and yellow 'Sony' logo. Into corridors of coloured cotton reels, corridors of ladies' underwear, narrow, closed alleyways of shoes and plastic watches that become darker and narrower until they're nothing more than tunnels one person wide that carry you through into another dirt and rubble street thick with women selling tin cups and men plying woven cloth,



DONKEY CART



HAND CART, MADE FROM A WELDED STEEL FRAME, BIKE WHEELS AND WITH A WOODEN BOARD FLOOR; FOR TRANSPORTING EVERYTHING FROM FIREWOOD TO REFRIDGERATORS

sleeping under tables between customers.

The street opens out and around a corner, bristling with sickles, machetes and cast-iron mincers, the traffic passes in a blur again. It thunders with the battered green mini-vans that star as public transport, thronged about by swarms of scooters and motorbikes spewing fumes into the atmosphere. Bamako's main roads seem to have a pecking order that goes something like this: Minivans > Mercedes Benzes > Peugot Taxis > motor-scooters > donkey carts > hand carts > bicycles > pedestrians, with the footpath, the gutter and the edge-most lane of the road the interchangeable territory of the last four.

On the other side of the road I can see three layers of market stalls, the first is a now familiar array of bananas and fruit juice in plastic bags. But beyond, between parked cars and edging the wall around the Artisans' Market there are stalls of traditional medicine. Piles of animal pelts and stacks of canine skulls, many with skin and fur still in place, rolled snake skins, ribs and teeth, not quite dried heads of monkeys, hyenas, warthogs and a cheetah piled in baskets.

Something shifts in this Saturday night city. When the afternoon sun is losing its sting, I walk to the Marché de Medina, through the cobbled grid of backstreets that quickly gives way to dust and piles of timber. These streets are largely given over to pedestrian traffic and human-sized activities. In the afternoon they are populated by children playing marbles, or football with limp balls. Older men in their prayer caps lounge in deckchairs, smile and wave at passers-by, while tight clusters of young men sit around a

Cabine Telephonique. Further along, mothers sit with their children, deep-frying slabs of fish over charcoal fires, a billy goat is tethered to a street tree nearby, feasting on a selection of leafy branches. A young man chops wood, tossing the kindling expertly into cones that stack up across half the road.

The Marché de Medina is country far from the tourist haunts and labyrinthine Grand Marché. Medina is roughly a grid of stalls covered with tin and thatched rooves, gradually drifting up the foothills of the escarpment that edges the city. Through breaks in the tin and where the roof doesn't quite meet you can see the mountain, brown and hazy beyond.

The thousands of feet that have trodden these corridors have worn the ground smooth, the soil worked away to leave a surface of slippery stone. Foul-smelling black streams criss-cross the paths, carrying with them bottles and plastic bags. Beneath the thatch women fry fish while fathers read to their sons amid walls lined with luminously patterned fabric. Between booths of second hand clothes, a crowd of boys gather around a Playstation, enthusiastically gunning down fantastical enemies.

The market opens out into a fresh produce area, the hillside becoming a mass of vegetables and women with baskets, hemmed in by buildings on either side. An enormous junk heap is perched on the crest of the hill, looming over the vegetable stalls on one side and salvaged machine parts on the other. Blackened car parts reach metres into the air, precariously held in place by a bamboo frame.

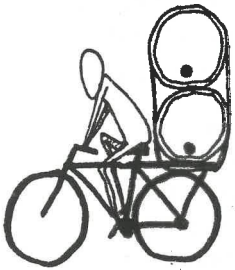
When I start to walk back down the hill, there are children

washing in the street from brightly coloured buckets and women sitting in groups, leaning against the ochre walls of their homes combing and braiding one another's hair. Music flows down the street towards me. Little school chairs cordon off a dusty intersection. There's a post-apocalyptic DJ set-up and in the centre of the intersection children dance in their best clothes, a blur of pattern and flowing colour.

I find this place's enthusiastic defiance of urban zoning amazing. While there are sharp contrasts between the heavy traffic of the paved arterial roads and the more human scale of the residential streets, the lines between public and private space seem to be constantly, if subtly, blurring. While the compounds of houses in the city are a stage for domestic chores, what in urban Australia would be considered 'private' activities are not restrained by the high walls that surround them. Here, in the heart of Bamako, any residential street is also simultaneously space for wood-chopping, street stalls, professional or domestic hair-dressing, football playing, washing clothes or children, drying laundry, goat-grazing, refrigerator repairs, roving vendors, sitting, people-watching, gathering, dancing, music playing, conversing, as well as being a thoroughfare. Streets are public space, yet they are public in that they are open for shared private use: life is lived in the community of the streets. Mothers set up fires for cooking snacks to sell to passersby, shops sprawl into the street, moulding themselves into the overall flow. I wonder whether there's a formal process for these streets becoming populated and utilised in

THINGS SEEN ON BIKES:

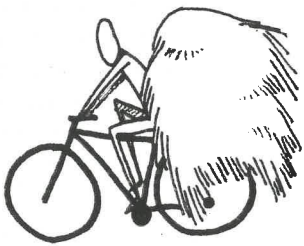
A FAMILY OF FOUR



TWO 44-GALLON PETROL DRUMS

A SACK OF FABRIC

A MOBILE TAILOR'S HAND-POWERED SEWING MACHINE & FABRIC



A BALE OF HAY

the way they are. I suspect it simply just happens, growing dynamically into a self-organising system.

Darkness brings out the contrasts of this city. The small squares of foreign hotels and restaurants, patisseries and pizza shops shine in fluorescent splendour, ringed by the parking lights of four-wheel-drives and guarded by an army of local security guards. In these haunts, as with the hotels, the television stations are all European: skiing, the health of the Estonian economy, French federal politics and Parisian catwalks. The mango juice is imported from the United Arab Emirates, and the purchasers of the patisseries' mountainous gateaux wear moonboots with gold belts, denim pedal pushers and surf-brand singlets. In the world of foreigners, everything is from somewhere else.

I awake with the dawn call to prayer, piped into the streets from a nearby mosque. The hum of traffic on the main road several blocks away begins its steady climb to a midday crescendo.

I'm in that limbo before leaving, so for my last afternoon I decide to just sit. I find a slab of concrete, shaded by an overhanging tree and watch the street life go past. Very soon, I'm surrounded by children delighted to have an audience for their antics. One perpetually smiling boy with a battered bike races up and down the patch of ground in front of me, periodically crashing into the nearest available surface. Another, wearing a little Juventus Football Club singlet, roars with laughter as he boots his football, zigzagging across the road dodging bicycles and women carrying trays of bananas on their heads, pausing only to

extract the errant ball from the drain. A slightly older boy, dusty from a day's work, sits silently beside me. Picking at ants biting him under his t-shirt he offers fatherly warnings whenever the bicycle stunts threatened to draw blood.

A couple of girls coyly sit behind, doodling on the pavement with chalk, glancing up to check I'm still watching. Their baby brothers sit contentedly on the edge of the gutter. One boy, no more than two years old, sits solemnly sucking a mango seed and waving a leafy branch, while his companion sets to sifting through plastic bags.

I wanted to get some photographs of them playing football, a trademark of Bamako street life. At the appearance of the camera however, they went completely crazy, pulling faces, singing little songs, flapping their arms madly as they perform kung-fu monkey dances. When I showed them the photos on the screen, they almost passed out from excitement, before going into another round of monkey dancing. In time, they disperse, drifting off back to their homes. All of them no older than six years old as they happily navigate their neighbourhood, chatting and warning one another of oncoming traffic.

The elation I feel during the taxi ride to the airport catches me by surprise. Maybe because it carries me faster than I've moved in days it feels like some kind of feel-good montage of memories of this place: hand-carts, dustbowl streets, charcoal-blackened markets, pirogues and their fishermen on the Niger, nation-building murals, hand-painted billboards, goats napping under trees and processions of children walking across expanses where plastic bags gather and grow.

This zine is drawn from my experiences in Mali and at Nyéléni 2007, the World Forum for Food Sovereignty. I'd love to hear what you think:

PO Box 108
Unley SA 5061
AUSTRALIA

madhorsemanofmarrakesh@yahoo.com

If you'd like to learn more about the World Forum for Food Sovereignty, visit www.nyeleni2007.org or www.realworldradio.fm

Hear from you soon, Joel.

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email me at j.catchlove@yahoo.com